

History of Education Society

Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948 by Barbara Dianne Savage

Review by: Arthur Zilversmit

History of Education Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Winter, 2000), pp. 511-513

Published by: [History of Education Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/369739>

Accessed: 21/06/2014 03:27

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



History of Education Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *History of Education Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Arkansas, Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, and Louisiana State University preceded it (four of them as a direct consequence of the “rising tide” of litigation); only Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi came later.

Florida ex rel. Hawkins v. Board of Control (1956) is said to have applied to “higher education” (p. 105) the decisions in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954 and 1955) overturning *Plessy*, but the Supreme Court spoke in *Hawkins* only of “a graduate professional school.” *Frasier v. Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina*, a lower court decision in 1955, applied *Brown* to undergraduate education, and in 1956 the high court upheld that decision, but this work makes no reference to *Frasier*.

This encyclopedia is more sure-footed on elementary and secondary schooling than on higher education, and the entries are sounder than the historical framework in which they are placed. The lapses mar a reference work that is otherwise very useful. At most points, readers will find what they need as they seek to work their way through the tangled history and contemporary situation regarding the practices and policies surrounding access and equity in the contested realm of race and education.

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
AND STATE UNIVERSITY

PETER WALLENSTEIN

Barbara Dianne Savage. *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999. 416pp. Cloth \$45.00, paper \$18.95.

As America entered World War II it was clear that the nation needed to be unified to succeed in this unparalleled struggle. All immigrant groups were important to this effort, but winning the loyalty of African Americans was especially crucial because they were increasingly impatient with the humiliations of Jim Crow, a lack of access to jobs, and segregation in the armed forces. The “Double V” campaign—a call for victory abroad *and* victory at home—became a major theme in the African-American community. Black leaders made it clear that they would not tolerate a repetition of what had happened after World War I when their loyalty had been rewarded by the lynching of ex-soldiers and the continuation of Jim Crow. Yet policy makers also knew that they would face white resistance to any change in race relations.

On behalf of the government, the United States Office of Education and the Office of War Information, stepping very cautiously, used radio, then in its “golden years,” to educate Americans about the value of a multicultural society. The story of one of these broadcasts illustrates the prob-

lem facing the nation. The program featured Paul Robeson singing Earl Robinson's "Ballad for Americans" with its message that each of us, from many races and different backgrounds, is an American. The New York audience loved it and applauded for fifteen minutes after his performance. Yet when Robeson left the studio to have lunch with friends, he was refused service in the restaurant of a nearby hotel.

Professor Barbara Dianne Savage (from the University of Pennsylvania) tells the story of these educational efforts in *Broadcasting Freedom*, a well-written, thoroughly researched account of an important aspect of American educational history and the history of race relations during the crucial period that prepared the grounds for the civil rights movement. In 1938, at the beginning of the decade she includes in her study, African Americans were rarely presented on radio; when they were, the image was usually a degrading picture such as that presented by the two white men who assumed oral black faces as Amos 'n' Andy. If the needs of African Americans were to be taken seriously, that image had to change. By the end of the decade, Savage points out, that change had begun.

The efforts of the federal government to promote racial harmony and to blunt the growing African-American discontent emphasized African-American talents and achievements. A series, *Freedom's People*, broadcast on the NBC network in 1941-1942, highlighted African-American accomplishments in music, literature, the visual arts, and science. It did not, however, deal with segregation or other current issues. Nonetheless, the series was hailed by the black press and it drew an especially enthusiastic response from teachers who wanted to bring African-American history into the curriculum.

The Roosevelt administration's timid efforts at promoting an appreciation for black culture were short-lived. Southern racists who held a great deal of power in Congress simply cut off funding for these efforts. The problem, however, remained and others stepped into the breach. The National Urban League, for example, produced a series of broadcasts promoting equal opportunity for African Americans in industry. After the race riots of the summer of 1943, at the urging of a committee of African-American and white entertainers organized by the NAACP's Walter White, CBS broadcast an "Open Letter on Race Hatred." According to Savage, "The race riots finally . . . inspired the type of radio show that . . . African American federal officials repeatedly had urged the Office of War Information . . . to air; one that targeted the racist attitudes of White Americans." However, she points out that, "[t]he task of fashioning a national response to the riots had been assumed not by the racially timid Roosevelt administration but by an alliance of CBS network officials and writers, entertainers, script writers, and the liberal Republican, Wendell Wilkie" (p. 179).

Throughout the decade, non-governmental institutions continued to lead the way. In 1944, *America's Town Meeting of the Air* provided a forum

for Langston Hughes who “launched a frontal attack on the race problem,” accusing the nation of discriminating against black soldiers. The next year, its panel included Richard Wright who went much further. He called for an end to residential segregation, a desegregated army and navy, and then went on to tackle the most controversial issue, calling for an end to bans on intermarriage. “Gradual solutions are out of date,” Wright proclaimed to his national audience. “Whether we have a violent or a peaceful solution of this problem depends upon the degree to which white Americans can purge their minds of the illusions that they own and know Negroes” (pp. 217–218). While many whites were outraged, African Americans were pleased. The black members of 477th Bombardment Group, stationed in Kentucky wrote directly to Wright: “From all of us thanks a million. . . . We do not *ask* for democracy, we *demand* it” (p. 221).

In 1947, after President Truman’s Committee on Civil Rights issued its report calling for an end to racial discrimination, the University of Chicago’s highly respected discussion program, *Round Table*, self-consciously devoted a broadcast to helping to create the “mass climate of public opinion and information” that was required to implement desegregation (p. 230). Savage argues that “the show itself became a part of the massive public education program the report generated . . .” (p. 230). By this time, of course, Cold War politics, as well as the new voting strength of urban African Americans, provided a new impetus for examining traditional racial policies.

While the national networks were increasingly willing to offer discussions of racial issues by 1948, local radio stations in New York and Chicago led the way in providing forums for forthright discussion of these issues and thereby illustrated “radio’s enormous potential as a medium for cultural and political education . . .” (p. 270).

Broadcasting Freedom tell us how radio in the 1940s “helped to redefine and expand the concept of Americanness and freedom” and prepared the way for the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s (p. 271). It is an important story and it is well told.

LAKE FOREST COLLEGE

ARTHUR ZILVERSMIT

Naomi Rogers. *An Alternative Path: The Making and Remaking of Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital of Philadelphia*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998. 360pp. Cloth \$50.00, paper \$23.00.

The history of the institution known over the years as the Homeopathic Medical College of Pennsylvania, Hahnemann Medical College, Hahnemann University, Medical College of Pennsylvania (MCP)/Hahnemann University, Allegheny University of the Health Sciences, and once again